DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 449 CG 014 296

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TITLE Futuristics and Professional Education.
PUB DATE 18 Oct 79
NOTE 18p.: Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the World Future Society (2nd, Minneapolis, MN, October 18-21, 1979).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; Delivery Systems; *Futures (of Society); Postsecondary Education; *Professional Education; Professional Personnel; Program Descriptions; *Social Services; Social Workers; *Systems Approach; *Values

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the current and potential contributions that futuristics can make to professional education and to the professions in general. A brief description of how the School of Social Development (SSD) at the University of Minnesota Duluth has incorporated futuristic principles is presented as a basis for analyzing the relationship between futuristics and professional education. Social development, growing out of a social work tradition is referred to as the process of planning institutional change to bring about a better fit between human needs and social policies and programs. Several basic concepts are described as principles of futuristics, including imaging the future, creating the future, a long-term time perspective, an interest in values, a systems orientation, and using futures methodologies to anticipate future demands. The way in which social development has adopted several of these futuristic concepts in developing a new approach to improving human services by choosing specific values is addressed by the following: (1) fulfillment of basic human needs; (2) human dignity; (3) equality of means; (4) participation; and (5) global awareness. A systems approach emphasizing macro-level changes in social service programs incorporated by SSD is also described. (Author)

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ED185449

Futuristics and Professional Education

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Paper Presented to the
Education Section
World Future Society
Second Annual Conference
October 18, 1979

CG 014296

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Futuristics can make significant contributions to professional education and to the professions in general. A futuristic orientation can enable educators to redefine the role of the professional in society and consequently to redefine the nature of professional education. These redefinitions will allow educators and professionals to better meet the current and future needs of society.

This paper will describe how one professional School (the School of Social Development) has incorporated a futuristic orientation in designing its educational program and will explore how other professional schools may undertake this process. First, some key components of a futuristic orientation will be described. Secondly, the traditional social work model will be briefly presented and the futuristic orientation will be applied to expand this model. Thirdly, a description of the concept of social development and of the educational program of the School of Social Development will illustrate the outcome of this application. Finally, the prospect for applying the futuristic orientations to other professions and to professional education will be explored.

The Futuristic Orientation

In this section of the paper, an attempt will be made to describe the basic components of the futuristic orientation, or what might alternatively be termed the futuristic view of the world. This task is a difficult one, for there is currently no consensus on the components of the futuristic orientation. The Study of the Future, published by the World Future Society,[1] provides a basis for this section.

One basic component of the futuristic orientation is imaging the future. Since the future does not actually exist, the ideas that we hold about the future--sometimes referred to as "images of the future"--are of crucial importance. In studying the future we are actually studying only ideas, but these ideas, or images, may be viewed as the blueprints we use to construct our lives and the world around us.

A second basic component is the concept of creating the future. Again recognizing that the future does not exist, futurists emphasize that the actions (or inactions) of today are creating the world of tomorrow. Earl Joseph has concluded that the world we will experience in five to twenty years is being shaped by decisions made now and that almost anything can be done in twenty years.[2] From the futuristic perspective, a concern for the more distant future must, therefore, be a criteria for current decision-making.

A third component of the futuristic orientation is a systems or wholistic view which emphasizes the interconnectedness

of everything in the world. This view recognizes the impossibility of fully comprehending any single entity without considering its place within the whole. From this holistic perspective, human beings are viewed as much a part of nature as anything else in the world. Because of the complex and expansive interrelationships of the human and natural environment, futurists have a deep conviction for preserving the natural environment and for a global outlook on the world.

Futurists have adopted a long-term time-perspective. While most people are preoccupied with immediate concerns, futurists often project five to fifty years into the future. This long-term perspective allows futurists to focus on averting the major crises and problems of tomorrow, while the person without a futuristic view may become preoccupied with the relatively minor difficulties of the day. Futurists exhibit a genuine concern, not only for the current population, but also for the people who will inhabit the earth in the near and distant future.

Another component of the futuristic orientation is the use of specific methodologies to study and forecast the future. Trend forecasting, cross impact matrices, the Delphi technique, scenarios, relevance trees, and simulations are all methods which are used to study the future. These methods, while generally not scientific in the strict sense, can provide structured techniques for thinking more clearly about the future.

Because of their general concern about the future and the belief that we can create the future, another component of the futurist orientation is a focus on values. Values may be defined as the criteria by which one decides to choose. Since futurists tend to believe in the freedom of individuals to make decisions that will have tremendous positive or negative future consequences, they have deep interest in the criteria used in making these decisions. A study of values is often a key component in the futuristic orientation.

Application of the Futuristic Perspective to Social Work

The School of Social Development (SSD) as it currently exists is the result of applying several components of the futuristic orientation to the traditional model of social work. By describing the emergence of SSD during the past eight years, we can gain an understanding of how a futuristic orientation has been incorporated within the School. A more complete description of the concept of social development and of the educational program will be provided in the next sections.

The School of Social Development at the University of Minnesota-Duluth began as the new School of Social Work in 1971. It was initially expected that SSD would develop along the lines of other traditional social work schools of that time. A brief description of social work during this time follows.

One common definition of social work used in the early

seventies was as follows:

> "Social work is concerned with the interactions between people and their social environment which affect the ability of people to accomplish their life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize their aspirations and values. The purpose of social work therefore is to (1) enhance the problem-solving and coping capacities of people, (2) link people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities, (3) promote the effective and humane operation of these systems, and (4) contribute to the development and improvement of social policy."[3]

Social work traditionally focused on the first two purposes described above, with a lesser emphasis on the third, and a limited emphasis on the fourth.

The three basic approaches to social work at that time were casework, group work, and community organization. In casework, social workers used interviews to identify problems of individuals and families. They then helped these people to understand and to solve their problems and to receive needed services, education, or training. In group work, social workers helped people to understand both themselves and others better, to overcome racial and cultural prejudices, and to work together with others in achieving a common goal. They planned and conducted activities for children, adolescents, older persons, and other adults in a variety of settings. In community organization, the social

workers coordinated the efforts of various groups to combat serious problems through community programs. During the early seventies, casework was the dominant approach of social workers, followed by group work and community organization.

As you will discover, SSD did not become a traditional school of social work. Several factors contributed to the emergence of SSD (the name was changed in 1974), among them the futuristic orientation of some of its faculty. A primary influence was the literature concerning international social development. This literature emerged from the United Nations and emphasized the futuristic concepts of a wholistic (systems) approach to development and a long-term time-perspective.[4] The wholistic approach perceived that political, economic, and social systems must develop simultaneously if societies are to develop in positive ways. In focusing on the development of entire societies, it was necessary to adopt an extended time perspective, as experience demonstrated that societal development is a lengthy process. The U.N. literature on social development thus expanded and extended the relatively limited view the social work profession had taken of its purpose.

The futurist concept of imaging the future emerged within SSD in an attempt to find direction for social development. Development implies change, but questions surrounding the consequences of change arose: "In what areas should this change occur?", "Toward what end is change directed?" In

attempting to answer these questions, the faculty and students in SSD began to image a future characterized by relatively abstract concepts such as fulfillment of basic human needs, social justice, and social equality. This image of the future was at first quite nebulous, but it is continually being refined and clarified.

As images of the future developed, it became apparent that appropriate models for creating the future in the area of social services were needed. While social work skills aimed at systems change were recognized in the social work literature and some of these skills were taught at schools scattered throughout the country, no existing school of social work emphasized these skills. SSD became the first school of social work in the U.S. to emphasize social policy analysis and development, social planning, human service administration, community organizing, and social research as social work skills which can be incorporated to create the future within the domain of the social services.

Social work in general and SSD in particular have had a continuing interest in the values which serve as guidelines for the professionals in these fields. It became apparent within SSD that the expanded role envisioned for the social worker/developer required a value base which extended the values of traditional social work. In 1977 a futures methodology, the Delphi technique, was used to identify and clarify the values which serve as criteria for the process and outcome of social development. The results of this study will be described in the next section.

The Social Development Approach

The application of futuristic concepts to traditional social work practice drastically altered the focus of the SSD orientation to social services, as may be partially understood from the preceding section. The systems orientation, the long-term time-perspective, the concepts of imaging and creating the future, and the emphasis on values were all critical in the emergence of the social development approach. This section of the paper will more fully describe the concept of social development and contrast it to social work.

Social development is defined within SSD as the process of planned institutional change to bring about a better fit between human needs and social policies and programs. The emphasis on planned or purposive change grows out of the futurist ideas of imaging and creating the future. It is recognized that change occurs constantly and that much of the change that currently exists is without purpose or direction. Social development emphasized the need to make conscious decisions about the direction of change and to undertake activities to produce the desired change.

The systems approach adopted by SSD has led to a focus on institutional, structural, or macro level change. In the past there has been a tendency to blame the victim for the negative situation in which he or she was found. For example, the resident of a black ghetto was held by many to be totally responsible for his or her place in society.

Increasingly, the institutions or systems in a society have been identified as primary determinants of many social problems. Institutional racism may therefore be viewed as the primary cause of the black ghetto. Social development is aimed primarily at changing institutions and systems--i.e., policies, agencies, programs, and social roles and expectations--and not at changing individuals.

The term social development implies that it is necessary to focus on the distinctively human aspects of development. Previously in the United States we have emphasized economic development, that is planning and change efforts to directed primarily at maximizing the efficient use of physical resources. Social development emphasizes a need for more comprehensive and coordinated policy and planning on a regional and national basis which will address the social needs and enhance the human potential of everyone in the society.

Social development also promotes primary prevention of social problems. Primary prevention refers to action taken to prevent individual problems from occurring before they start. In contrast, secondary prevention refers to early intervention once a problem has identified, and tertiary prevention is an extension of secondary prevention wherein action is taken after a problem becomes more serious. Using chemical dependency as an example, drug education may be viewed as primary prevention, crisis intervention and responsible use groups are examples of secondary prevention,

and treatment for chronic alcoholism may be viewed as tertiary prevention. Social development advocates primary prevention as the appropriate response in attempting to address the root causes of a variety of social problems.

In many ways, values are central to the social development approach. Obviously, in developing an image of a desireable future and in deciding on methods to create that future, several value judgments must be make. A Delphi study of social development values polled the views of thirty-eight people associated with SSD who were selected for their expert knowledge of social development values. In questionnaire #1 each participant was asked to list four values which could be used as guidelines for 1) the process of social development and 2) the goals of social development. In questionnaire #2 each respondent ranked the seven most important process values and the seven most important goal values which were obtained from the first questionnaire. They were also requested to comment on each list of values. The preliminary vote results and a listing of previous comments were included in questionnaire #3. Respondents were again asked to rank the seven most important process and goal values. The seven highest ranked process values and their definitions were as follows:

1. PARTICIPATION . . . . . People possessing equally the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.

2. RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY . Recognizing and accepting as valid the basic worth of each human being.

3. GLOBAL AWARENESS . . . . . Recognizing that the consequences of change can go far beyond the persons and situations most directly affected (i.e, secondary and tertiary consequences).

4. NONDISCRIMINATION . . . . . Treating others equally, regardless of sex, race or other ascribed characteristics.

5. HUMANISM . . . . . Focusing on the needs of individual human beings as opposed to the needs of institutions.

6. COLLECTIVITY . . . . . Having consideration of the common good take precedence over the pursuit of individual rights.

7. SELF-DETERMINATION . . . . Guaranteeing the right of individuals to pursue personal and group goals.

The seven highest ranked end-state (or goal) values and their definitions were as follows:

1. FULFILLMENT OF BASIC HUMAN NEEDS . . . . . An end-state where each person has adequate housing, food, health care, shelter and safety.

2. HUMAN DIGNITY . . . . . Inherent value in each individual is recognized and respected.

3. EQUALITY OF MEANS . . . . . Each person has equal access to social (freedom from oppression) political and economic opportunities.

4. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACT . . A structure in which everyone can join in the decision making process in all matters affecting their lives and interests.

5. PEACE . . . . . The absence of war, non-violent coexistence.

6. SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE HUMAN INSTITUTIONS . . . . . The purpose of institutions is to meet human needs, not to preserve themselves.

7. HEALTHY HUMAN ECOLOGY . . . A balanced interrelationship between society and the natural environment.

The values described above are related to social work values,[5] but demonstrate the influence of a futuristic orientation as well.

As can be seen from the description above, the futuristic concepts incorporated by SSD resulted in a social development orientation quite different from the traditional social work approach. Social work has traditionally focused on providing direct service to individuals and small groups in an attempt to solve current problems. Social development has emphasized macro level change which will develop policies and programs to better meet the needs of people for the future. The social development approach has supplemented and complimented the orientation of traditional social work.

Education for Social Development

Because of the unique focus within SSD, an educational program very different from that of traditional social work has developed. Traditional social work curricula provided students primarily with the skills and knowledge necessary to work directly with individuals and small groups, such as interviewing, individual problem diagnosis, contracting, and treatment modalities. In introductory SSD classes, by contrast, students are exposed to systems theory, to opportunities to image the future that is most desireable to them, and to general

models of creating the future (planned social change). Students are encouraged to develop a knowledge of the political and economic processes related to social development. The SSD curriculum encourages students to develop skills in social policy development, social planning, administration, community organization, and social research. Throughout their classes, students are encouraged to explore the values they hold with regard to the processes and goals of planned change. In addition, students are exposed to some futuristic methodologies as they pursue to their learning objectives. A more thorough description of the SSD curriculum is provided elsewhere.[6]

In conclusion, the SSD educational program differs significantly from the other schools granting an M.S.W. degree. While the social work profession and the SSD curriculum has by no means been completely "futurized", the profession of social work has been partially reconceptualized from a futuristic viewpoint, and the educational program has been redefined to educate the type of professional who can contribute within this new conception.

Conclusion: Implications for Professional Education

The preceding description provides an example of how a futuristic perspective can transform the conception of a profession and consequently redefine the nature of professional education. While the profession of social work is used in the example, a futuristic orientation can be (and probably has been) applied to other professions as well. Persons involved in medicine, nursing, law, education, engineering, business, and

other professions can similarly incorporate a futuristic perspective, reconceptualize the role of their profession, and alter their professional education programs accordingly.

In incorporating a futuristic perspective, other professions may find similar components of futuristics to be useful. A systems approach, long-term time-perspective, concepts like imaging the future and creating the future, futures methodologies, and a focus on values will be appropriate to examine a variety of professions. A new conceptualization of the role of a profession can thereby be developed.

It is speculated that the reconceptualized role of other professions may be similar to several aspects of the social development focus. Most often the image of the future that is developed will differ significantly from the world that currently exists. For this reason, the change function of the profession will most likely be emphasized. Given the futuristic orientation it is probable that systems (as opposed to individual) change will be emphasized and primary prevention will be given more consideration by the profession. The values promoted by the profession may similarly reflect the futurist orientation.

A new educational program will most likely be designed to provide professionals to fill newly conceptualized professional roles in society. Chances are good that these programs will focus on the skills and knowledge necessary to create the future within the domain of the profession. In addition, futuristic concepts and methodologies will be incorporated into the educational programs.

The professions in general and professional school in particular have the potential to become self-serving and to become stagnant within a changing society. Some writers have gone so far as to view the professions as groups which restrict progressive change within society.[7] It is hoped that in incorporating a futuristic orientation into the professions, professional education can contribute to creating a future world which approximates the ideolized images which so many of us hold for the future.

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